

HOW TO... Decorate online

Fancy a new colour scheme in your home, but not sure if you should take the risk? You can paint a virtual room without splashing out, as Mike Bedford explains

Choosing a colour from the paint charts in your DIY store is a real hit-and-miss process, because small patches of colour can look dramatically different from a whole wall. Sample pots are an improvement, but you can still end up with a nasty surprise. You could just hope for the best and paint the entire room, but that might be a costly mistake, in terms of time and money. Fortunately, there's a better method: take a digital photograph of your room and paint it onscreen. Many paint manufacturers now offer this service.

Here we'll show you how to paint a virtual room of your home using a free software package called My Rooms in Colour, which you can download from the Crown website at www.crownpaint.co.uk. For this project, you will need to install the software and get a photograph of the room you are going to decorate on your PC. The picture we've used in this tutorial is on the cover CD, if you would like to follow our instructions exactly.

1 Start the software and, on the opening screen, click on the Go button in the 'Paint your own rooms' box. This takes you to the 'Choose a room' screen. Click on the Go button in the My Room box. Then on the next screen, select your photograph using the Browse button at the left of the screen. Your room will appear in the Preview box. Enter a name for your project in the box below the photograph, select the type of lighting from the drop-down box underneath the preview, and click on Go.

2 Type a descriptive name for your first surface (such as Wall 1) into the box underneath 'Name the surface you want to paint'. Click on the Select surface button and pick either Walls and Ceilings or Trim in the menu that appears. Finally, click on Add.

3 Next, click on the Colour Highlighter tool – the button with an icon of a magic wand on the bottom left-hand side of the window. Then click anywhere on the surface to be painted and, while still holding down the mouse button, drag to the right. An area is highlighted in blue and this increases in size as you drag right and decreases as you drag left. Highlight as much of your surface as you can without going beyond its boundary, then let go of the mouse button. Now click in another, unhighlighted part of your surface and do the same. Continue until all your surface is highlighted.

4 Because the lighting probably wasn't uniform when you took your photograph, you might find it hard to select an entire surface this way. So we'll select another surface using a different method. In fact, you can use a combination of both methods if you want. First, add another surface as we did in Step 2. Click on the Outliner Tool (it has the icon of a pencil), then draw round the surface to define it. Just click once to start the outline and once each time you

change direction. When you get back to the starting point, your selection will be defined.

5 Repeat Step 2 followed by either Step 3 or Step 4, or a combination of the two, until you've defined all the surfaces you want to paint. If you are mixing both on one surface, use the Outline tool, perhaps for the straight edges, then the Colour highlighter tool. Click on the '3. Paint' button at the top of the window. This takes you to the 'Paint your own room' screen.

Select either Walls and Ceilings or Trim in the 'Type of surface' menu. Click on a colour category button (Whites, Creams, Yellows, Greens, Blues or Reds). This displays a paint chart for that colour. Choose a colour you like; scroll down to see the full selection. Move the onscreen pointer (it will turn into a paint brush) over any surfaces that match your selection in the 'Type of surface' menu (in our case, Walls and Ceilings). Click on the surface to paint it. Repaint as many times as you like. To see what goes with the colour you have selected, click on Contrasting, Tonal or Harmonising in the bottom left of the window.

6 When you're happy with your colour scheme, click on the '4. Finished project' button and a summary page is displayed, showing how your room will look and which paints you've chosen. Click on the Print button to get a printout that you can take with you to the DIY store.

EXPERT TIP

To see a surface more accurately while you're highlighting it, use the zoom facility, which is the magnifying glass icon at the bottom of the screen.

